

Morrow opens new walking trail tunnel



Photo by Curt Yeomans Morrow Elementary School fifth-grader, Christina Giang (center), and Morrow Mayor Joseph “J.B.” Burke (right center) cut the ribbon to open the city’s new “ToMorrow Tunnel.” The underground passageway goes under Ga. Hwy. 54, and is part of the city’s Pathway Walking Trail system.

Morrow residents no longer have to play a real-life version of the old video game, “Frogger,” to get across Ga. Hwy. 54, near Clayton State University.

On Monday, city leaders took a step toward their goal of eventually tying all of the city’s neighborhoods and parks together through a single system of walking trails, by opening a tunnel that goes underneath the highway. The tunnel — which is called the “ToMorrow Tunnel” — is part of the city’s 2-mile “Pathway” walking trail system. It is located at Morrow Station, which is next to the Georgia Archives, and the university.



Photo by Curt Yeomans Approximately three dozen people walked down a portion of Morrow’s Pathway walking trail system on Monday to attend the opening of the system’s tunnel, which goes under Ga. Hwy. 54.



Photo by Curt Yeomans Morrow Elementary School fifth-grader, Christina Giang (center), was recognized at the opening of Morrow's "ToMorrow Tunnel," on Monday. The youngster was honored for coming up with the passageway's name.

The \$997,000 tunnel virtually completes the second phase of the three-phased Pathway System the city is building, city officials explained during a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the underground passage. The tunnel was paid for with federal stimulus funds, they said.

"This is a big deal for the city," Morrow City Manager Jeff Eady told attendees at the ceremony. "It's a big piece of the puzzle that will eventually create a loop around the entire city."

Although city leaders are celebrating the completion of most of the second phase of the walking trail system, the opening of the tunnel has a deeper meaning for Morrow. The walking trail now connects the neighborhoods that are on one side of Ga. Hwy. 54, with those on the opposite side of the roadway — without making residents deal with the hassle and risk of trying to cross the busy highway.

"This will bring families out to walk our pathways, and further connect with the east side and the west side of Morrow," said Mayor Joseph "J.B." Burke.

Burke said the tunnel will be lighted at night. He added that the city is also installing video cameras at the entrances to it, as well as inside it, so the city can monitor activity in the passageway at all times.

"We can go back at any time, and view events that took place in this tunnel," the mayor said.

The walking trail system is intended to eventually be three miles in length, and connect residents with recreation and educational facilities, according to Mike McLaughlin, the city's economic development director.

"We're looking to have a 3-mile system that will connect all of the neighborhoods in the city, and the little parks that we have in the city," McLaughlin. "The idea is that this will connect with our transit station, if commuter rail does eventually come here. You'll be able to go from your home, to the transit station. And, of course, it connects Clayton State University, as well, to the Pathway System."

Eady said there is a 400-foot area, between the tunnel's western entrance, and Westward Way, that still needs to be completed to finish the second phase. He added, however, that the city is waiting for Clayton County officials to grant an easement, because the county owns the land where the final section would be located.

Design and engineering work on the trail system's third phase — which would extend the trail from Morrow Road, to Interstate 75 — is expected to begin soon, Eady said.

Morrow will also begin heavy promotion of its Pathway System, according to the city's economic and tourism officials. The tunnel's own name may allow the city to promote it as a new landmark.

City officials held a "Name The Tunnel" contest for fifth-graders at Morrow Elementary School earlier this year, and 11-year-old Christina Giang came up with the winning moniker. She said she chose "ToMorrow Tunnel" as the name because she wanted to incorporate the city's name in the passageway's title.

Giang said she only recently found out her suggestion was chosen as the official name for the tunnel, when Morrow's leaders came to the school to recognize her. "I was so excited, because I thought it wouldn't be me — but it was me," she said.

Burke expects "ToM" —the nickname for the "ToMorrow Tunnel" — will soon enter the lexicon of Morrow residents, as they get used to having the underground walkway in their city. His comments on the name, and how it could be used, alluded to a possible marketing campaign to promote the tunnel.

"The ToM Tunnel!" the mayor exclaimed. "It's going to catch on. [People could say] 'I'll meet you at the ToM.' I can see this happening."